

The Vision of the Cross

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One curious phrase employed by Nazarius is worth noting. It is that in which he claims that the special interference of Heaven on behalf of Constantine was not merely an extraordinary and gratifying tribute to the Emperor's virtues, but that it was no more than is due. In short, the crisis was so tremendous that heaven would have stood convicted of a strange failure to see events in their just proportion if it had not done "some great thing" and wrought some irresponding wonder. Such was the idea at the back of Nazarius's mind; we suspect that it was not wanting in the mind of Eusebius or of Constantine. We may put the matter paradoxically and say that miracle in those days was not much considered unless it was a very great one. People who were accustomed to see—or to think that they saw—statues breathing blood, and to hear words proceeding from the mouths of bronze or marble, and were accustomed to treat such untoward events merely as portents indicating that something unusual was about to happen, must have been difficult people to surprise. Naturally, therefore, legends grew more and more marvelous with repetition after the event. The oftener a man told such a story the less appeal it would make to his own wonder, unless he fortified it with some well-known incident. But to impress one's auditors it is above all things necessary to be impressed oneself* hence the well-garnished narrative of Nazarius. The idea of armies marching along the sky was common enough. Any one can imagine he sees the glint of Caprons as the sun strikes the clouds. But this does not satisfy the professional rhetorician. He bids us